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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003278

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: PLANS FOR RALLY, THAKSIN RETURN, UNCLEAR

REF: A. BANGKOK 3210
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 1914

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Pro-Thaksin groups are threatening to bring supporters from outside Bangkok to swell the numbers at the anti-junta protests this weekend. They are likely to march again, perhaps on Army HQ or the house of Thaksin nemesis Privy Councillor Prem. This threat, combined with the announcement that Thaksin would return "soon," has raised the level of tensions in Bangkok, as many have leapt to the premature conclusion that Thaksin will be back by Saturday to lead the demonstrations. Police appear to be preparing responsibly for the weekend rallies, and say they are committed not to use force. A list of leaders of the new protest coalition "DAAD" is included, para 6. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Pro-Thaksin groups are threatening to ramp up their demonstrations. On June 3, the demonstrators announced that they would rally daily until June 24, their target for ousting the Council on National Security (CNS). Last Saturday, about 10,000 of the protesters marched on the Army headquarters without serious incident. On Sunday, the crowd reached about 25,000, based on our rough estimation (REF A). Rally organizers say that, starting today, they will bring in more supporters from outside Bangkok for rallies this weekend, and some sources indicate that they are planning this to be the last hurrah for the protest rallies. They would likely march from the protest site at Sanam Luang again. with Army Headquarters and the home of Thaksin nemesis, Privy Counselor Prem, suggested as possible targets. (For list of groups in the new protest coalition, see para 6).

[1](#)3. (C) RSO Police contacts say that they have been meeting daily to discuss the way to handle the crowds. The CNS has emphasized the need to be sure that the protests do not get out of control. The police believe that the best course of action is to let the crowd march where it wants to, but protect any government building they target. The police say that they are committed not to use force and will take care in responding to provocations. RSO's contact expected the protests to be larger this weekend, but did not appear to be overly concerned about violence. He did express concern that the number of police deployed might not be sufficient if

serious violence broke out. We also understand that the police will be watching the roads into Bangkok, and will try to prevent other groups of protesters from coming into the city. The police contact denied rumors of a curfew being put in place over the weekend.

¶4. (C) The police contact estimated that some 40% of the crowds turning out for the demonstrations were genuinely committed to the cause. Other participants might be paid to participate. (One embassy maid said she'd been offered 500 baht to attend the rally; someone from her neighborhood is responsible for recruiting protesters and ensuring they participate in order to get paid.)

WHERE'S THAKSIN?

¶4. (C) Thaksin's lawyer announced on June 12 that Thaksin would return home "soon," with the date to be determined within the next few days. PM Surayud and "military leaders" told the press that Thaksin could return if he wished, although Surayud said that "after the general elections" would be a better time to return. The lawyer threatened that Thaksin could return to politics in response to government "bullying."

COMMENT

¶5. (C) The two announcements -- bigger rallies and Thaksin's return -- have ratcheted up levels of concern here, with many leaping to the conclusion that Thaksin will be back by Saturday to lead the protests. This is not yet clear, but it

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seems likely to be a tense weekend in any case.

DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE AGAINST DICTATORSHIP

¶6. (C) The anti-junta rallies have been led by the People's Television (PTV) group. Several former Thai Rak Thai members tried to register a cable TV station, but have been blocked from doing so (REF B). PTV began to rally in March, ostensibly to protest this restriction on press freedom, but the demonstrations quickly morphed into pro-Thaksin rallies. Ex-TRT MP and executive board member Wira Musikaphong is the senior PTV leader. Wira has a colorful political background: he started out in the Democrat Party and was later in GEN Chavalit's New Aspiration Party when it merged with TRT in ¶2002. He quit TRT this year along with two other TRT members to set up PTV. He has been banned from political office before (convicted of lese-majeste, in 1986, but was pardoned) and was involved in an abortive coup in 1977. In order to appear less "pro-Thaksin" and more "pro-democracy and anti-coup," PTV has sought other partners to participate in the rallies. Many pro-democracy NGO types are reluctant to participate, as they oppose Thaksin's return. This week, Wira joined with six other coup opponents to form the "Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship." (It is worth noting how closely the DAAD parallels the development of the anti-Thaksin People's Alliance for Democracy - PAD - which led the anti-Thaksin protests last year. PAD formed around the core protest group led by Sonthi Limthongkul, who started out by protesting the cancellation of this broadcast TV show.) The DAAD on June 10 elected Mani Jitjanklab, a former Supreme Court judge reportedly close to Thaksin, as leader. Other members include:

Prateep Unsontham Hata (ex-senator, noted social activist in Bangkok slums)
Weng Tojirakarn, Confederation for Democracy (former communist, supported the anti-Thaksin demonstrations last year.)
Viputhalean Pattanaphumthai, Saturday Voice Against Dictatorship

Shinawat Habunphad, Taxi Drivers Protection Association
President (spearheaded the movement of taxi drivers
supporting Thaksin last year during the PAD protests)
Chupong Teetuan, 87.75 community radio host (former leading
figure in the Caravan of the Poor and vocal Thaksin
supporter.)
BOYCE